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ABSTRACT

This paper contrasts the reactive and proactive approaches to personal growth and development for college students at a university. The potential of residence hall education and proactive growth activities is specifically pointed to, while all of student affairs are challenged to look at the more proactive growth model. Basic goals of a proactive growth program, specific experiences offered to students, review of research, as well as "new directions" are thoroughly covered to give the reader an opportunity to get an overall picture of a program of this nature. Some additional thoughts concerning the personal experience of being a proactive individual in a university setting are also shared. It was suggested that in the future a program could offer mini-workshops, each exploring a different approach to personal growth, such as sense awareness, fantasy, dreamwork, body movement, body message, non-verbal, and gestalt-awareness training. (Author/BW)

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PROACTIVITY: PERSONAL GROWTH GROUPS FOR RESIDENCE EDUCATION

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Residence Education Now -

In reviewing "The Educational Role in College Student Housing" (DeCoster and Riker, 1971), the general objectives for college student housing are offered on a five level hierarchy, with all levels being interrelated in nature, while each representing a somewhat distinct set of student needs. Personal Growth Groups generally aim at meeting the educational levels of the hierarchy, while more specifically provide "opportunities for individual growth and development."

What traditionally, or typically has occurred in the area of growth and development is a "problem-reactive" pattern. As we begin to notice a growing problem with drugs, we react with films, panels, and demonstrations concerning the drug problem. When we recognize a black/white problem on campus (in a residence hall setting) we usually react to it in a variety of ways, including an in-service education workshop for all R.A.'s concerning race relations, and again show films, etc. What the reactive approach tends to do is wait for problems or needs to arise and then react to them with activities designed to "clear up" the problem.

The "reactive" approach has most often been used when providing opportunities for individual growth and development. In describing the challenge confronting the student personnel and other helping professions, Foulds and Guinan (1969) say "We can no longer be content to focus on adjustive, remediative measures to revitalize human experience." They suggest that persons working with students, such as we, become more proactive and that our activities become more growth-centered rather than problem-centered if we are to make a maximum contribution to the university and ultimately to society.

The potential of residence education is pointed to by Rand and Carew (1970), "one of the most powerful learning centers on college campuses, and perhaps the most overlooked, is the residence halls." A recent study by Estler (1969) reveals that residence halls and peers are responsible for stimulating and facilitating three to five times as much student learning as are classes.

It seems essential to incorporate the "proactive growth model" presented by Foulds and Guinan (1969), for residence education, the division of student affairs, and the university to fulfill more of its potential and role. One part of proactive programming for residence education that we have experienced is Personal Growth Groups offered through the Growth Program originally sponsored by the Department of Housing. ...

Proactive Growth Model for Student Affairs (i.e., housing) -

We have experienced a way of reaching a large number of students, offering a wide range of proactive growth experiences, through a Growth Program, which began in October, 1971 as a part of residence education at the University of Georgia. The program is concerned with the expansion of human awareness and experience and with the maximum development of human potentials. Specific experiences are designed to help students to grow, learn, and change, in the following ways:

1. Facilitate intra- and inter-personal openness and authenticity, and to learn to receive and send more clearly the signals and communications of feelings.

2. Facilitate sensitivity to one's own inner world of experience, becoming open to and experience the process of self-exploration and self-development.

3. Break down barriers, learn to effectively cope with the full range of experience, and increase creativity, productivity, and imagination.

4. Create and discover new and more exciting goals, values and commitments, focusing on the continuous search for personal identity and meaning.

"The primary goal of the Growth Program is to facilitate and encourage personal growth in many areas by providing opportunities and experiences for students to become involved in their own growth. The program offers an opportunity for residence education to fulfill more of its potential in the educative goals of the University and the Department of Housing. We successfully have tapped the large potential for growth and learning existing in the residence halls by developing this proactive program (Witchel, 1972(b))."

Experiences Offered to Students -

Growth group - relatively unstructured group experience focusing on the here-and-now, moment-to-moment experiencing of individual participants and the interaction among them. The experience provides opportunities for personal development and experiential learning through authentic encounter and confrontation with self and others. A variety of time structures have been used including: weekly (4-hour)groups; walk-in groups; 12, 14, and 24-hour marathon experiences.

Focus groups, workshops, and seminars - A number of group experiences focusing on a particular theme, aspect of human experience, or way of fostering personal growth have been offered. Some of these have been: On being a Man; On being a Woman; the dilemma of the white American; Couples (married, engaged, dating) workshop; Ways of Growth Seminar (including, sense awareness, body massage, gestalt-awareness training, fantasy, and dreamwork); communication workshop (including 'telespots', three-minute films on communication problems). Other workshops which might be offered are: games people play; yoga, personal growth through movement, sexual politics; homosexuality experience and students; and black/white encounter. The areas to be explored are unlimited and offer rich opportunities for growth and learning.

Research -

We feel the need to explore what we are doing to better understand the impact we are having on students and to meet students' needs, as well as plan for the future. We have conducted one month follow-up studies for the marathon group experiences. One completed study (Witchel, 1972a) indicates that self-reports on a one month follow-up questionaire were highly positive with regard to the perceived value of the group, as they look back at how they felt about the experience then and how they feel now, one month later. They generally felt that the group was a highly valuable personal growth and learning experience and expressed ways in which they changed behaviorally as a result of the experience.

We are beginning to use the Personal Orientation Inventory (Shostrom, 1963), a measure of self-actualization, to look at personality changes facilitated by a group experience. One study (not completed) shows an increase in the group means of all 12 areas of self-actualization (significance not yet determined), on the post-test completed by students participating in a 14-hour marathon experience.

My doctoral dissertation (in progress) will provide a 10-week gestalt awareness training experience, and will measure behavioral changes in the participants of the experience. The research demonstrates the value of growth group experiences being offered as a way of providing proactive personal growth experiences for college students. I feel that the Growth Program activities provide students with a unique opportunity for personal growth not available to them anywhere else on campus (this has been personally experienced, as well as related to me by many students).

New Directions (?) - (this section was written 6 months ago, before Proactivity was confronted with Reactivity's reaction at U. of Ga.)

We feel the need to expand-grow, reach-out, and offer more types of experiences to students. Hopefully, we will receive support from other people on campus who are professionally trained and experienced in some area of personal growth to help us expand-grow!! Student response to the program has been excellent, which also supports our need to expand.

In the near future we want to offer six-hour mini-workshops, each exploring a different approach to personal growth (i.e., sense awareness, fantasy, dream-work, body movement, body massage, non-verbal, gestalt-awareness training). Students could participate in one or more of these experiences, becoming involved with as many ways toward personal growth as they choose. We also want to offer large group (100 to 200 participants) experiences providing an opportunity for persons to explore and discover new ways of meeting, getting-to-know, and being-alive-with others, using a variety of large group experiential techniques (i.e., sense awareness, non-verbal experiences, and gestalt-awareness). These experiences would allow us to reach many students and provide them with an introductory growth experience, which may facilitate their becoming involved with a more intense experience being offered.

Our fantasies for the future show what might be called a "Residential

Growth Center", providing students with a unique residential living experience. Students wanting an intense personal growth experience would select to live in the Residential Growth Center for a year and participate in a large variety of growth experiences with others in this setting. The kinds of experiences offered would include most of what has been previously described in this paper, along with the uniqueness of living with a large group of people (150-250 students) who are actively involved with their own growth, and who are intensely exploring ways toward fulfilling more of their potential. The potential of a Residential Growth Center is unlimited and only by experiencing it could we begin to know the affect it would have on the lives of the college students and staff who would participate.

Some Realities of Being Proactive -

One possible consequence of being proactive is to see-hear-sense and experience life differently than reactors. I might easily and clearly see opportunities to fill gaps left open by traditional education, which a more reactive person might deny exist. Even more severe is denying the denial. Persons on the campus saw life at the university and what we were attempting to do different than we did; and as a result reacted in a direction they are so skilled at - successfully stopping (tentatively) the program.

One of the realities of being creatively proactive is the possibility of being accused of all sorts of radical things. Well it is radical and so needed that it is obviously overlooked by many. One of the unhealthy behaviors of a reactor is he/she has a very objective experience of what others are experiencing (when he is looking from outside the programs activities, as with our experience at U. of Ga.). They also have learned to react to political realities in the direction of stopping growth and learning activities because of a not-so-good political atmosphere. Enough on this...What I learned from all of this is "it was better to have done something and get stopped, then not to have done it and feel guilty".

Presently we have begun to offer a limited amount of growth experiences to students with the sponsorship of a graduate department in the college of education. The department does not offer close student contact like housing, but we are going to try to once again receive support from the housing people. I believe this is very possible since the people in housing were extremely supportive even when the division of student affairs disagreed with them. It is very difficult to hold back growth and change especially when a large number of people got a healthy taste of it. Another interesting thought - if people aren't trying to stop you and what you are doing, are you really doing anything? It might be valuable to genuinely look at what you are doing and assess the value it has for you and students, as well as other staff.

Some further thoughts I'd like to Share -

I am remembering Wilson Van Dusen saying at a recent conference about his being able to understand why persons use drugs; they really don't have, or know of other ways to turn on to themselves. My experience (and possibly yours) of college students is that they generally seem to be bored, routine-like, dulled and in using Fritz Perls description of people in America "walking corpses".

I have also experienced college people as being alive, turned on to their experience, joyous, and 'flowing'. The potential is there-here, it only needs to be recognized and made use of.

The college experience is certainly lacking a great deal, esspecially any attempt at focusing on the 'person' of the student and the potential he holds within him. I am acutely aware of the necessity to provide students with opportunities to help increase their personal experience. I'm remembering a number of students recently telling me (when the program was discontinued) that the group experiences were-are more to them than anything else the university is offering to them, including classes and the way they spend their weekends. This all, along with the goings-on inside me is what I am responding to in offering proactive growth group experiences to students at the university.

Stop for a moment..and be with yourself alone... and search inside for who you are?...what are you doing here?...who are the persons around you?..... I need to do this and help others to do the same, its all very simple and yet rarely happens to happen, especially at a university where our job is to educate!

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